

Lesson 1

Violence in the heart of the family -- case studies

Opening ritual: Repeat the opening ritual of visualizing the circle of women that await you. Silently acknowledge, "I am not alone. My co-learners (name each of them slowly, visualizing them as you do so) are out there wondering and waiting to see what I will do and say during this session. I anticipate interacting with them as I go forward." Embellish this ritual and make it your own. If after a few sessions, the ritual seems empty, feel free to drop it. If the impact grows on you, continue it and allow the mysterious presence of your co-learners to diffuse your studies.

[Buddhist singing bowl \(click to listen\)](#) The learning circle is now open.

Notice to user: The pdf version of lesson 1 and 2 are removed from the Moodle software; hence, the links are broken such that one cannot hear the sounds or recordings, one cannot see the pictures and one cannot post responses to the chatroom and to see what other participants have posted. Nonetheless, one can still learn much about the process and mood surrounding interactive learning and one can imagine the growing "sense of presence" that surrounds the learners who are using the "live version" of these case studies.

After each lesson, there is a live chat room experience or a face-to-face classroom experience of 90 minutes. The rituals and procedures used here expand upon the social interactions and the discoveries that have been made during the time of doing the lesson. Different viewpoints are expanded using impromptu role playing and fastspeaks. Oral readback lines enable the group to enter into a partial or full consensus as to what are the key discoveries that have emerged. This is a lively and playful experience. It cannot be imagined; it has to be experienced!

Aaron Milavec

Introduction

In the first two lessons, we will be examining Case Studies in order to better understand why violence against women most often takes place in the heart of the family. Technically, this is referred to as "[domestic violence](#)." On the web, I found this message:

*i am 22 and my boyfriend beats me
i am so ashamed i canT LEAVE HIM COZ I love him
and no one understands me... (Salina)*

This is not an exception. A Google search shows me 279k sites that contain the words "my boyfriend beats me." More than two times (668k) that, one finds "my husband beats me." And 22 times (15,500k) that, one finds "my father beats me."

And, yes, women can be violent, too. A Google search reveals 286k sites that contain the words, "my girlfriend beats me" and 317k sites with "my wife beats me." Statistics show a somewhat different picture. [Men kill their female intimate partners at about four times the rate that women kill their male intimate partners](#). Research by Jacquelyn Campbell, PhD RN FAAN has found that at least two thirds of women killed by their intimate partners were battered by those men prior to the murder. ([www](#))

According to the results of the findings of India's third National Family Health Survey (NFHS-III) released on October 11, 2007, over 40% of Indian women have experienced domestic violence at some point in their married lives, and nearly 55% [of Indians] think that spousal abuse is warranted in several circumstances, particularly if she disrespects her in-laws. A smaller number think bad cooking or refusing sex are reasons for physically assaulting their wives. Buddhist women [in India] reported the highest levels of violence (41%) followed by Muslim and Hindu women (34%-35%) and Sikh and Christian women (26%-28%). Women from the Jain community reported the lowest levels of violence - 13%. ([www](#))

Domestic violence has many forms, including physical violence, [sexual abuse](#), [emotional abuse](#), [intimidation](#), [economic](#) deprivation, and [threats](#) of violence. The remainder of this Lesson will focus primarily upon men abusing women.

This lesson has three activities:

- Activity #1: Examining dowry-related torture and death of young wives (India)
- Activity #2: Dynamics undergirding spousal abuse
- Activity #3: Examining the personal story of an abused wife (USA)

Opening thoughts

You are about to engage in dialogue with many women and a few men. You will get to glimpse their joys and their sorrows. You will discover what they cherish and what they despise. You will see them laugh and hear them cry.

For our learning circle to succeed, we need to create a safe place for ourselves and for every other participant. Each of us needs to know that we are in a safe place where we can freely tell our own stories (both good and bad), share our confusion, explore our hunches, and reveal our own deepest questions (without fear of ridicule). Given my own classroom experience in helping "strangers" create a safe place together, I would put forward the following guidelines:

1. The most important gift that we can give to each other is to create a safe place where every member of our learning circle can find her/his true voice and to express herself freely.
2. The gift we can offer each other is to nurture a sense of respect and mystery in the presence of co-learners struggling to adequately express and make sense out of a spiritual path to which they may or may not feel personally called.
3. Everything posted here, accordingly, will be honored as "confidential." No outsider or guest to this website can pry or spy into this, our "sacred space." Meanwhile, each participant can be counted upon not to reveal to any outsider what has been posted here.

What is our starting point?

Some form of [dowry](#) exists in nearly every society. Here are three examples:

#1 In places like the USA, hardly anyone speaks of "dowry" today. Yet, everyone knows that the father of the bride is normally expected to pay for the wedding and the reception (food, drinks, and music) that follows. Even this tradition, however, is bending to new circumstances during the last 50 years:

For centuries it has been tradition that the father of the bride pays for the wedding.... These days, it's very common for the couple to pay themselves, or for both families to donate a set amount of money. Whether you [the father of the bride] choose to pay all or any is entirely up to you and perfectly acceptable. ([www](#))

#2 According to Islamic traditions, Allah freed the father of the bride from the burden of a dowry:

A Muslim father does not have to bother for dowry, as there is nothing called 'Dowry' in Islam. On the contrary, Islam enjoins the groom [not the father] to give a 'Bridal-Gift' or 'Dower' as a token of love and assurance to his would be wife at the time of marriage. In fact without payment of this sum, the marriage cannot get solemnized. The Holy Qur'an instructs the believers: "And give the women (whom you marry) their dower (obligatory bridal gift) happily" (4:4) The Prophet [Muhammad] (pbuh) said: "[The best of the marriages is one which is least burdensome in the financial sense to the families of the bride and the groom.](#)" ([www](#))

When I was a guest in a traditional household in Sidi Boulbaba, located in southern Tunisia, Fatima was engaged to be married at the age of 16. This engagement, it was explained to me, would last as long as it took for her fiancé to earn the dower. The fiancé or his family are also expected to finance the wedding celebration (which extends three to seven days) at the home of the groom.

Tradition establishes the "dower" as the cost of maintaining a household for

one year. The dower is presented to the bride in the form of gold jewelry that she will proudly wear at her wedding and which will become her personal property that her husband has no right to touch. This dower, it was explained to me, was the Islamic form of "social security" that protected the wife in the case of her husband's prolonged illness, abandonment, or premature death. With the dower the wife could maintain herself and her children for a period of one year. ([Click for additional details.](#))

Polygamy was abolished by law in Tunisia since 1976.

#3 In India, the dowry can sometimes be an enormous financial burden. In a newspaper report, one finds the following:

"If I don't kill her today; tomorrow she will kill me financially or someone else will burn her for the sake of dowry," rationalizes the would be father of an unborn female child, at the time of deciding [whether to make] a premature end of her [through abortion]. Such is the evil of dowry, rampantly prevailing in Indian society. A study has revealed that an estimated one million (1,000,000) female fetuses are being destroyed every year in India alone where, even today the birth of a female child is [viewed as a curse](#). As soon as a daughter is born, the family in general and the father in particular starts calculating the huge financial burden that lies ahead of him. ([www](#))

Experts say that sex-selective abortions in India reduced the number of girls per 1,000 boys from 945 in 1991 to 927 in 2001. Gender-based abortions have been illegal since 1994 but, as the data shows, this has not slowed the rate of abortions of females. ([www](#))

[Exploratory Questions 1.1](#) <--Click here to post your responses.

1.1a What has been the tradition in your own family respecting dowry/dower?

List the cultural advantages and disadvantages of this tradition?

1.1b Which of the three traditions named above (#1, #2, #3) seems most preferable for all concerned? List the cultural advantages and disadvantages of this tradition as you understand it?

1.1c Which of the three traditions named above seems most disagreeable to you?

List the cultural advantages and disadvantages of this tradition as you understand it?

How do you share your thoughts with your learning circle?

1. Begin by clicking on the "Reflective Questions 1.1" that will always be found just prior to any questions. (You can also find Reflective Questions 1.1 listed as "1.1" in a table at

- the very bottom of this page. You can, as an alternate, click on this as well.)
2. Step 1 opens a new window in which you will find the questions repeated. Click on "Reply" found in the lower right corner. This opens a blank text box awaiting your response.
 3. Type your reflections into this blank message box. Don't think that you have to do research so that your responses are "perfect." Rather, risk writing spontaneously and rapidly about the issues at hand.
 4. Feel free to experiment with the various features of the textbox editor. Be daring! You won't be able to break anything. Feel free to add a JPG picture to embellish your response.
 5. Click on "Post to Forum" when finished. You are free to change the subject line if you wish and to provide, in its place, an apt title of your own choosing.

You can always go back and edit your former posts. This is not encouraged, however. Better to let your raw self-expression stand. If you are annoyed by what you wrote, add a few lines indicating why you are annoyed. Even if your mind has changed, it's better to add a few lines saying how your mind has changed and why. Each of us is "a wonderful work in progress."

Activity #1 Examining dowry-related violence

Case Study: Dowry-related torture and death of a young wife

Bhubaneswar (WFS) 17 Jan 2005.
About six months ago, according to several newspaper reports, Kamal Pradhan, a farmer in Kanwar village of Bargarh district, got his daughter, Pushpanjali, married to Bhishmadeb Nayak of nearby Badapali village. Recently, on receiving information that his daughter had committed suicide, Pradhan rushed to Badapali.

Pushpanjali was dead but Pradhan [her father] strongly suspected that she had been murdered. He claimed that ever since the wedding, his daughter's in-laws had been making increasing demands for

dowry. They had also reportedly been torturing Pushpanjali.

When Pradhan returned to his village he voiced his suspicions. And by the same evening, about 200 men from his village gathered around his house. In Kumbhari village nearby, Pradhan's brother, too, heard the disturbing news. In both these villages an increasingly agitated crowd of men swelled.

Somewhat later that evening, the mob decided to seek revenge. The incensed men then marched to Badapali and into Bhishmadeb Nayak's two-storeyed house. His father Bipin Nayak (65) and mother Draupadi (60) were pulled out of the house and tied to pillars in the centre of the village. Also present inside the house was Ranu (name changed), Bhishmadeb's 18-year-old, college-going sister. Eight young men from the crowd dragged her out and gang-raped her. Villagers allege that they not only stripped her naked and beat her up badly, they also photographed the heinous rape with the aim of blackmailing her family, preventing them from revealing the crime, and "spoiling" her chances of getting married.

The mob's rampage continued for five hours. Bhishmadeb [the husband], who ran to the police station to report the violence, was put into the lock-up, ostensibly on charges of murder related to dowry.

There was worse to follow for Ranu. Two days after the gang rape - while she was obviously in trauma - she was asked to identify the men who had been accused of raping her. She is said to have fainted during the identification parade. The next day the police marched to her house and arrested her. And a day or so later, she was produced before the court on charges of aiding and abetting the dowry torture and murder of her sister-in-law.

What is even more shocking is that Bargarh's Superintendent of Police, P S Ranapise, admits that the rape took place while three police constables [policemen] looked on. When the mob attacked Bhishmadeb's house, the three constables were in Badapali to investigate the murder angle of Pushpanjali's death. Ranapise also says that the allegations that Pushpanjali was tortured for dowry appear to be true.

According to a study conducted by AIDWA, dowry homicide and dowry torture in Orissa has risen by more than 400 per cent in the decade 1990-2000. The latest police statistics only confirm this trend. Until September-end 2004, 320 dowry deaths were reported [in Orissa], accounting for one-third of total murder cases reported in the state. The number of dowry-related suicides was 25, but it must be noted that [most reported suicides turn out to be cold-blooded murders for dowry](#). In the same period, there were 898 dowry-related torture cases. Reported rape cases number 541. Overall, crimes against women increased from 4,026 cases during the same period in 2003, to 4,164 in 2004. (Copyright Women's Feature Service Jan 17, 2005)

Since India opened up to foreign investment in 1990, the country has seen a rise in dowry-related violence alongside its economic boom. Dowry deaths surged from 400 a year in the mid-1980s to 5,800 a year in the mid-1990s, according to a 2001 report in Time magazine. The fact that more people are coming forward to report the crimes accounts for part of this increase, but official

figures are still thought to reflect a mere fraction of the total number of dowry killings. The Indian National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reports that there were about 8172 dowry death cases registered in India in 2008 ^[4]. Incidents of dowry deaths during the year 2008 (8172) have increased by 14.4 per cent over 1998 level (7146).^[5]

Exploratory Questions 1.2 <--Click here to post your responses.

1.2a How do you explain Bhishmadeb's [Bishma+deb] conduct in allowing/encouraging members of his family to torment/torture his wife in order to collect additional dowry payments from her father? [Hint: [Click here.](#)] If tormenting the new bride is an effective means to gain small dowry payments, then how can harrassment of the bride quickly escalate to acts of torture by way of gaining large increases?

1.2b Did Pradhan (the bride's father) have legitimate reasons for "strongly suspecting that she [his daughter] had been murdered"? If so, list some probable reasons. Did Pradhan have legitimate reasons to bypass the police when seeking his pursuit of justice? If so, why so? If not, why not?

1.2c Explain the cultural logic behind the rape of Bhishmadeb's 18-year-old, college-going sister? Explain the logic behind photographing the event? Explain what might have prompted the three police constables to watch the rape and not take action against the eight perpetrators?

1.2d Notice that the weight of suffering falls upon the new bride and her sister-in-law? Is this just accidental (a peculiarity of this case) or is it the result of some hidden cultural factor? If the latter, name it and use it to explain how it is that women experience a disproportionate suffering when the men around them fail?

1.2e Do you come away with some unsettling or unanswered questions? If so write them here. [Please endeavor to answer questions posed by your co-learners.]

How do you respond to what others have posted?

How do you give readback lines?

1. Once you post your own reflections, the reflections of one or more of your learning partners will appear. Click on them and read them quickly.
2. **When you find something helpful, leave a "thank you" note. If your confused by a post, leave a clarifying question. If you resonate with someone's story, link your story to theirs.** To do this, click on the "Reply" button found at the bottom right of each post.
3. **The best and the easiest kind of feedback is to offer [readback lines](#).** To do this, click on the "Reply" button at the bottom right. Then pick out a phrase or sentence in what your co-learner wrote that strikes a resonate cord in you. Highlight it with your mouse and copy it (Ctrl-C). Then move you cursor into your reply box and paste it (Ctrl-V).

Repeat this process a second or third time if you feel so inclined.

Offering "readback lines" is both the easiest and the most demanding form of feedback. In so doing, the reader reveals how her/his internal depths have been mysteriously kissed awake by the evocative words of the writer.

In our upcoming live chatroom, we will be using "readback lines." Hence, please make it a practice to offer readback lines for three or more of the postings in 1.3. Continue this practice after posting your response for 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6 below.

Responding to feedback received with a sincere "thank you" or "that was helpful" note is always rewarding for the one who honored your work enough to puzzle over it. Clarifications or expansions can also be asked for when needed. To respond to a feedback, click the "Reply" at the bottom right of the feedback box.

Activity #2: Dynamics undergirding spousal abuse

Spousal violence is a serious problem around the world. It violates the fundamental human rights of women and often results in serious injury or death. While statistics vary slightly, women are victims of violence in approximately 95% of the cases of domestic violence. While women do use violence against intimate partners, [women's use of violence](#) is distinct from men's use of violence in historical, cultural, psychological, motivational and situational ways. Statistics on the prevalence of the problem indicate that spousal violence is a worldwide epidemic. Studies show that between one quarter and one half of all women in the world have been abused by intimate partners. Worldwide, 40-70% of all female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner.

According to the World Health Organization, between 16 and 52 percent of women reported having been assaulted by an intimate partner. In the United States, 28 percent of women reported at least one episode of physical violence from their partner.

Exploratory Question 1.3

1.3 How do you explain why so many husbands feel that they have the right (or even the duty) to beat their wives?

Theories of why husbands batter their wives

Information regarding the evolution of [theories of violence](#) in the United States is useful because various forms of these theories are being discussed in many countries in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union.

1. The first theory developed in the United States was that men who battered women were mentally ill and that women who remained in violent relationships were also mentally ill.

2. Another theory developed [endeavored to demonstrate] that men battered because they learned this behavior in their families. Sons imitate their fathers because they never learn any alternative.
3. A third theory was that women suffered from a "learned helplessness" as a result of repeated battering, which prevented them from resisting the violence or leaving the relationship.
4. Closely related to the "learned behavior" theory were the theories that described violence as the result of a loss of control. For example, many believed that men are abusive when they drink because the [alcohol](#) causes them to lose control.
5. Others explained men's violence as a result of social conditions that sanction male aggression. ([www](#))

Exploratory Questions 1.4

1.4a Which of the five theories above shows the greatest promise for explaining why so many husbands intimidate and abuse (physically and psychologically) their wives? Explain.

1.4b Which of the five theories above shows the least promise for explaining why so many husbands intimidate and abuse (physically and psychologically) their wives? Explain.

MYTH: Domestic violence does not affect many Americans.

FACT: A woman is beaten every 15 seconds in the United States. Additionally, 63% of young men between the ages of 11 and 20 are serving time for homicide for killing their mother's abuser.

MYTH: Battering is only a momentary loss of temper.

FACT: Battering is the use of violence and other forms of abuse to establish control and power in a relationship. One in five female victims reports having been battered over and over again by the same person.

MYTH: Stress causes battering.

FACT: Obviously some batterers experience stress, but stress does not cause abuse. Many men under severe stress do not batter. Even if the practitioner helps the batterer reduce his stress, the violence will continue or eventually resume because the batterer still feels entitled to assault his partner.

MYTH: Drugs and alcohol cause the violence.

FACT: Addictions are used as excuses to free the batterer from responsibility for the behavior. This theory does not explain why the batterer uses violence, why he targets a woman for abuse, or why he batters when sober. The addictive batterer must be treated for two separate problems--his addiction and his violence. He will not necessarily stop battering if he gains control over his addiction.

MYTH: Battered women provoke the violence.

FACT: Any woman can find herself battered. The victim is not at fault but rather the batterer,

the partner who has committed a crime. No one can be responsible for another person's deliberate choices and actions. Domestic violence victims, however, frequently hear comments from their abusers like, "I did it for your own good," or from outsiders, "you must have really made him mad." These statements can confuse a woman and lead her to take responsibility for the violence or blame herself. No matter what, domestic violence is not the victim's fault.

MYTH: Only women are victims of domestic violence.

FACT: Approximately 95% of those battered are women; however, in a small number of cases, women are the batterers and their male partners, the victims.

MYTH: Domestic violence occurs only in poor urban areas.

FACT: Women of all cultures, races, occupations, incomes, and ages are battered by husbands, lovers, boyfriends, and partners. One in four pregnant women has a history of partner abuse.

(www)

1.4c Do you come away with some unsettling or unanswered questions when reading the above "Myths"? [If so write them here.](#) [Please endeavor to answer questions posed by your co-learners.]

Theories and statistics do not reveal the dynamics undergirding why some battered wives leave or commit suicide (another way of leaving) while others learn to cope within a dysfunctional system. To learn this, we have to listen and understand the personal stories of the women themselves. Here is one such story.

Activity #3: Examining the personal story of an abused wife

I, Julie, grew up in a very Mormon family. My ancestors crossed the plains and settled near Manti, Utah only to be sent to Southern Colorado to establish a Mormon [a.k.a. "Latter Day Saints"] colony there. . . . I was comfortable in the faith. . . . I had wonderful experiences, attending youth conferences, performing in road shows, talent shows, going to dances and performing in dance festivals. . . .

After a year of college at [BYU](#), I was married in the Mormon temple to a returned [missionary](#). He seemed like such a catch! [I was living the Mormon dream](#). Children began to join us - again and again and again until there were seven of them.

But there were severe problems. Sometimes that dream was a horrible nightmare. Sometimes that knight in shining armor was a monster. Sometimes he hit, kicked, punched and spat on me. . .

[There must have been some horrible things wrong with me.](#) The Mormon Church was true and yet I wasn't happy. Weren't we promised that if we followed the teachings of the Church and did everything they required that we would be happy? I tried. I decided to read the scriptures more. . . I asked [God] for blessings. I paid my tithing, I went to the temple. I did everything I could think of. I prayed and prayed and prayed.

The marriage became worse. No matter what I did, it got worse. **I prayed that I would make him happy**, that I could **save the marriage**. . . .

There was a point in my life that I was teaching 40 piano students, delivering newspapers, sewing for other people, sewing all the kids and my own clothes, teaching the kids at home, holding down 3 or 4 church jobs, making whole wheat bread 2 or 3 times a week, nursing a baby and was pregnant with another. My former husband kept telling me that I wasn't working hard enough and that I was lazy. The crazy thing was that I believed him. . . .

The cycle of abuse continued to escalate. Of course it was my fault. I would sit in church and my stomach would churn. If I was trying so hard, why wasn't anything helping. . . ? I must really be awful.

Why doesn't God love me? How could I ever hope to make it to [the celestial kingdom](#). . . ? I began to think a lot about dying.

There were a couple of things which began to happen:

[#1] I had been doing the music for a small Episcopal church in the community. These people had something that I was missing. Their God wasn't a god of condemnation and punishment. The women were treated well. . . . I enjoyed the love that was shared. Going to St. David's each Sunday seemed to give me a sense of hope and peace.

[#2] Another thing that happened was that the abuse became worse . . . for the kids, too. I had always tried to ignore it. I was too weak to do anything about it at that time. But one hot summer day in 1990, my husband got into an argument with Child #2. He took that boy to the garage and beat him relentlessly. He kicked him with steeltoed boots, punched his face, spat at him, screamed at him, beat his head against the wall of the garage. I stood there screaming, trying to make it stop. It just kept going. I called the police. (My husband was on the town council and was part of the 'good old boys' system in the town.) The police chief told me that I was just being neurotic and that my husband was just trying to discipline the kid and that he needed it. Somewhere inside me, the thought occurred, "[If you aren't going to do something about what he does to you, then at least do something about these kids.](#)" That day, I couldn't comfort that son. He hated me for not protecting him.

Of course, I turned to the church. I talked to the bishop. His advise was '[Go home and make your husband a cherry pie. That will fix everything.](#)' He told me to pray more and try harder. He asked '[What do you do to make him have to beat you?](#)'

So I tried harder. I started going to the temple more. Things didn't get better. After one particularly nasty fight, I packed up and left for a few

days, taking a couple of kids and hiding the rest. The bishop and my husband decided that I needed counseling. How right they were!

I began doing things I didn't understand. I found myself getting my own post office box. I got my own checking account. I began collecting some of my own piano money. I had little stashes [of money] lying around. I began making photocopies of important documents and hiding them.

I talked to an advocate for the Sexual Assault and Family Violence program. I began to read about family violence, cycles of violence, learned helplessness, and other issues. [I discovered that I was not alone.](#)

I asked my husband to get help. Of course, he [replied that he] didn't need any. So the bishop and my husband arranged for me to get help. I had an intake appointment with a Mormon Social Services counselor. I was one of the lucky ones. I had a counselor who asked, "Is this what you think marriage is about?" I said NO. He said, "Good. This may very well be a divorce situation." [I felt validated and like there was hope.](#) This man referred me to a counselor in my area. This was a key in helping me to understand myself and my situation. Unknowingly, the bishop and my husband had tossed me a lifeline. [For the first time in my life, I began to realize that I was okay. I realized I had choices and options.](#) This counseling was great! My husband agreed to go see the counselor. My husband spent the time telling the counselor what was wrong with me. Of course, my husband was okay. The counselor never tried to talk me into divorcing my husband. However, after I made that decision, he was very supportive.

My Bishop told me that he wanted me to sign a release so that the counselor could tell him what we talked about. The Bishop was conducting an 'investigation' of my life. The counselor wrote the bishop a letter advising him to leave me alone. . . . The Bishop and my husband decided that I should . . . quit counseling because I was getting 'funny ideas' and I should become more ['submissive.'](#)

It was too late. At one point, my husband's father said that if I were his wife, he would be forced to kill me. Hmm. Strong words. My husband decided he was going to make me love him again. Whoops. Again it was too late. They also decided that I should not be going to St. David's because I was getting 'funny ideas' from them. Whoops. Too late for that, too.

About this time, I was playing music at a Mormon Conference. [Boyd K Packer](#) was the visiting authority, reorganizing our local church. A man of God was coming to visit our community! His talk was so oppressive towards women and demeaning in general. More guilt and shame, only this time I wasn't buying it. I remember his cold, unfeeling gaze. . . . I thought, 'And this is a man of God?' Cold chills went down my spine and I realized that I was headed out of the church.

My prayer had changed. I was no longer asking God to help me to save the marriage or to be a good Mormon anymore. That day, I shouted out "God, is this what you want for me? If it is, then let me die! I don't want

to be around him. I can't fix him. I can't even fix myself. . . ." I screamed, I cried, I poured out my heart. [For the first time in my life, I was honest in my prayers.](#) I felt peaceful when I finished. I realized that I was going to divorce my husband, that I would be okay and that I wouldn't be alone. I felt a strength I'd never known.

I went home and went to lunch with my husband. I saw him through new eyes. I saw him as a pathetic victim of his family and of the church. But I knew that my job was not to fix him or accept any more of the abuse and pain. I realized that deep within, I had known what I was going to do. That's why I had my own post office box, my own checking account, and why I had been copying papers. . . .

My husband began to follow me wherever I went, including St. David's. He'd sit outside lurking while I was in there, then follow me home. I became more afraid. . . .

I saw an attorney in early December 1990. She was very helpful and I got everything gathered up and in her office. I informed my husband that I would be divorcing him and things got worse. On January 2, 1991, I got a [protection order](#). Divorce papers were served at the hearing.

I began seeing friends from my growing up years. One couple had left the church and gave me articles and books to read. Other people popped into my life who had left the church. I noticed that they were all happy. I quit wearing my garments [the standard dress of Mormon women]. I quit attending church. When the bishop began calling my friends in to question them about me, I stood up to him. . . .

I left the area and went to school since I had no real marketable skills. I got a five year degree in three years. I continued counseling, dealing with issues of anger, religious abuse, domestic violence, [PostTraumatic Stress Disorder](#), depression, and in creating an identity where none had existed. My identity for the first 36 years of my life was as a Mormon girl, wife, mother, as my husband's wife. I didn't know who I was and I am thrilled at finding out just who I am.

I was baptized at St. David's in May 1991, shortly before I moved away from the small town I left. I really didn't think my Mormon baptism was worth much. I was excommunicated from the church in June 1997.

I have come to accept the cultural heritage as a Mormon child. There were many wonderful people and wonderful times in my childhood and I can now look back on them with a smile. I can laugh at the culture. I can embrace the good things I learned and the parts from that system that I choose accept and leave the rest.

I don't know when recovery is finished because it happens like layers of an onion, but I like to think that I am over the difficult parts. I have grown to love myself and to become more loving with others. I see a spark of divinity in each and every soul. That hollow shell of a woman I used to be has died and reborn in her place is the person I am now. Very much alive and happy about it. No longer do I sleep with my fists clenched or in fear. I am no longer afraid of church authorities. The woman I am has an identity and a soul and is full of the fire of life. . . . ([www](#) minor editing for clarity)

Exploratory Questions 1.5

1.5a Julie speaks about "saving the marriage" at the same time that she speaks about her frantic efforts to please her husband so as to exert some control over his "[cycle of abuse](#)." She gets entrapped in blaming herself for the beatings she receives: "There must have been some horrible things wrong with me." What do you imagine are the sources of this self-blaming mentality?

1.5b Julie identifies two happenings (#1 and #2) as breaking her addiction to powerlessness and self-blame. Explain.

1.5c What do you make of Julie's transformation within her prayers? How has her image of God changed?

1.5d Explain how the network of men (husband, police, father-in-law, and Bishop) functions within Julie's culture to force her back into her earlier mindset. [Notice that when Julie has the internal strength to begin to confront her adversaries, she places herself and her children in an even more precarious situation.](#) Comment on the absence of any mention of her mother, her sisters, or her women friends as being instrumental in protecting her or in enabling her escape?

1.5e Notice the enormous amount of healing that needs to take place after the liberation from the household of her husband. What does this say to you? What might happen if Julie had left her husband but never done the years of internal repair work?

1.5f Do you come away with some unsettling or unanswered questions when reading Julie's narrative? If so write them here. [Please endeavor to answer questions posed by your co-learners.]

Battered women generally leave their husbands but then return to them for three to seven times (as did Julie in the case above) before they finally leave for good. Why is this? Motives vary from culture to culture, situation to situation. Here is an assortment of reasons from various cultures:

- "Battered wives return to their husbands [in order to avoid any dishonour on the family](#)."
- Or because "[their access to divorce is blocked and family members are strong-arming them to return to their husbands](#)"
- Or because of the "[economic and cultural pressures for women to return to their husbands](#)"
- "[Many abused women who find temporary refuge in shelters return to their husbands](#)."
- "Battered women [return to their husbands because of promises never to do it again](#)."

Women themselves often live in cultures that train them to anticipate a beating as a normal part of what it means to be married to a man. "He [my husband] told me that all women should be

beaten. I didn't protest because I was afraid he'd throw me and my children into the street," an Egyptian woman adds. "I'd seen my father hit my mother, and in every house in the alley a man hits a woman." ([www](#))

Some women even regard the lack of an occasional beating as a sign that their husbands do not truly love them. "A wife, from this [submissive] type of women, becomes more attracted and admiring of her husband when he beats her. Nothing, on the other hand, will sadden some women, as much as a soft, very kind and very obedient husband who is never upset regardless of being challenged!" ([www](#))

Exploratory Questions 1.6

1.6a What do you make of this psychological explanation (shown in blue) as to why some women need to be occasionally beaten in order to feel loved?

1.6b Overall, what are the new discoveries that you made in Lesson One regarding violence against women? How has your mind changed? [This is the key question here. Give it some time. After posting, carefully read and comment on all the responses of your learning partners.]

1.6c Listen to [the short video by Tony Porter](#) (see below). What surprises you about this video? What deep questions does it raise about how men are trained to treat/mistreat women? [Please endeavor to answer questions posed by your co-learners.] **If you had difficulties viewing the Porter video, detail the problems you encountered when posting. Click for help--> ["Having problems with playing audio and/or video files?"](#)**

Men talking to men: Don't "act like a man."

Tony Porter makes a call to men everywhere: Don't "act like a man." Telling powerful stories from his own life, he shows how this mentality, drummed into so many men and boys, can lead men to disrespect, mistreat and abuse women and each other. His solution: Break free of the "man box." [Click here](#) or paste this address into your browser:

http://www.ted.com/talks/tony_porter_a_call_to_men.html

Tony Porter is an educator and activist who is internationally recognized for his effort to end violence against women. [Full bio and more links](#)

When finished, take a break. Make some tea for yourself or take a five-minute walk or dance to your favorite music.

Feedback 1.7 Then, coming back refreshed, quickly review your entire experience. 1.7a How many minutes did you use to complete Lesson One? Was this more/less time than you had expected? Explain.

1.7b Are you at ease with giving and receiving readback lines? For how many participants did you offer readback lines? If more than 10, this is great. If less

than 6, then please do so for a half-dozen more participants after posting this.
1.7c Overall (on a scale of +1 to +10), what is your satisfaction with Lesson One? Is there anything that the Instructional Team should include or remove from this lesson? Please explain.



Congratulations!

With this, you have finished your first session. If only a few have posted their writings as of yet, return in a few days and post your responses to their writing.

[Buddhist singing bowl \(click on arrow to listen\)](#)

The learning circle is now officially closed. Return every few days to offer feedback to what your Learning Partner(s) have posted.

Take out 10 minutes during the next few days to do some housekeeping matters found in [Getting Started #3](#).

Further Readings and Viewings

Jessica Longaker, "[The Role of Women in Mormonism](#)" (1995). This is an excellent, researched article that accounts for how religion can be used systematically to fashion women conditioned to think and act in ways advantageous to their domineering men.

["Don't Suffer in Silence"](#) (India: 30 sec public TV appeal)

["For Women \[in Pakistan\], Cyber Crimes Are All Too Real"](#) 2010

By Zofeen Ebrahim

["Dowry demands 'killing' Bengali women"](#) (AlJazeeraEnglish 4 min. video)

Dowry Prohibition Act

In 1961, the Government of India passed [the Dowry Prohibition Act](#), making the dowry demands in wedding arrangements illegal.^[13] However, many cases of dowry-related domestic violence, suicides and murders have still been reported.^[14]

In 1985, the Dowry Prohibition (maintenance of lists of presents to the bride and bridegroom) rules were framed. According to these rules, a signed list of presents given at the time of the marriage to the bride and the bridegroom should be maintained. The list should contain a brief description of each present, its approximate value, the name of whoever has given the present and his/her relationship to the person. However, such rules are hardly enforced.^[15]

A 1997 report claimed that at least 5,000 women die each year because of dowry deaths, and at least a dozen die each day in 'kitchen fires' thought to be intentional.^[16] The term for this is "[bride burning](#)" and is criticised within India itself.^[14] Amongst the urban educated, such dowry abuse has reduced dramatically. ([www](#))

Optional Activity #4 Instances of grass-roots activity to prevent domestic violence (Bangladesh)

I want to introduce you to Beauty Ara:

Double-click on this image and you will come to understand how Ara's home visits are sources of transformation for wives and husbands in her village. You will also learn how Beauty Ara escaped from dowry-related abuse. [If the video fails to load, then copy this into your browser or click here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQW3Cc7kU94>]

(Optional) [Exploratory Questions 1.8](#)

- 1.8a Consider the drama reported by Beauty--"If it's a girl, I will divorce you!" "The greed for more dowry resurfaced." "Haven't seen my son in fifteen years." What stands out for you in her personal story? Explain.**
- 1.8b In what ways is Beauty Ara a gifted proponent in the "We Can" movement? What does her personal story bring to her home visits?**
- 1.8c Most women who escape from dowry situations intact and alive count themselves fortunate. By concealing their past, however, they hide the deep trauma that they take away from such horrendous circumstances. What does Beauty Ara gain by telling others her story?**
- 1.8d Have you yourself suffered a trauma that was healed when you were able finally to tell trusted friends? Please share.**
-

In Activity #4, you saw how women and men created street theater in order to address violence against women. The counterpart of this is the large number of young people making videos with the same purpose in mind. Here is a sample.



3:11

[Special Report: Domestic Violence](#)

6,590 views



0:31

[Censored](#)

28,201 views



1:07

[ABUSE IS USELESS \(domestic violence\)](#)

12,540 views



0:53

[Domestic Violence](#)

9,617 views



0:41

[Domestic Violence 'Cupboard Doors'](#)

9,752 views



4:27

[End Domestic Violence](#)

78,574 views

The [Dowry Prohibition Act](#), passed in India in 1961, prohibits the request, payment or acceptance of a dowry, "as consideration for the marriage", where "dowry" is defined as a gift demanded or given as a precondition for a marriage. Gifts given without a precondition are not considered dowry, and are legal. Asking or giving of dowry can be punished by an imprisonment of up to six months, or a fine of up to Rs. 5000. It replaced several pieces of anti-dowry legislation that had been enacted by various Indian states.^[6]

*Indian women's rights activists campaigned for more than 40 years to contain dowry deaths, such as the [Dowry Prohibition Act](#) 1961 and the more stringent [Section 498a of IPC](#) (enacted in 1983) which reads as follows: Whoever, being the husband or the relative of the husband of a woman, subjects such woman to **cruelty** shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.*

1. Chapter XXA inserted by Act 46 of 1983, s. 2. 212

*Explanation.-For the purposes of this section, "**cruelty**" means- (a) any wilful conduct which is of such a nature as is likely to drive the woman to commit suicide or to cause grave injury or danger to life, limb or health (whether mental or physical) of the woman; or (b) harassment of the woman where such harassment is with a view to coercing her or any person related to her to meet any unlawful demand for any property or valuable security or is on account of failure by her or any person related to her to meet such demand.*

If you would like to gain an in-depth understanding of the struggle of women in India, [click here](#) to read Madhu Purnima Kishwar, "Strategies for Combating the Culture of Dowry and Domestic Violent

Evolution of Theories of Violence

last updated February 1, 2006

A common understanding of the causes of domestic violence can help communities develop more effective responses to the violence; such an understanding helps avoid conflicting responses that could undermine efforts to protect victims and hold batterers accountable.

When the battered women's movement in the United States began in the early 1970s, the prevailing theory of why men batter was based on psychopathology. According to this theory, men who abused their wives were mentally ill and could be cured through medication or psychiatric treatment. Researchers found, however, that the behavior of perpetrators of domestic violence did not correspond to profiles of individuals who were mentally ill. Batterers attack

only their intimate partners. People who suffer from mental illnesses such as schizophrenia do not limit their violence to their intimate partners.

Initial studies also characterized battered women as mentally ill. The results of these first studies, however, were distorted because the studies examined women who were in mental hospitals; their batterers, who were calm and credible in contrast to their wives, were asked about the cause of their partners' condition and thus given an opportunity to minimize and deny their partners' account of the abuse. In reality, however, battered women are not mentally ill, and many of those who were institutionalized were misdiagnosed because of a failure to recognize or understand the physical and psychological effects of domestic violence. [From Joan Zorza, "Batterer Manipulation and Retaliation in the Courts: A Largely Unrecognized Phenomenon Sometimes Encouraged by Court Practices," *Violence Against Women* 47-48 (Joan Zorza ed., 2002)]

Researchers next theorized that violence was learned. They argued that men battered because they had learned violence in their families as children, and women sought out abusive men because they saw their mothers being abused. This was the "learned behavior" theory of violence. Yet women who witness domestic violence are not any more likely to be battered as adults. (A recent study reported by the Family Violence Prevention Fund does indicate, however, that women who were physically or sexually abused as children may be more likely to be abused as adults.)

Although research does show that boys who witness abuse in the home are seven times more likely to batter, many men who witnessed violence as children vow not to use violence and do not grow up to be batterers. A more consistent explanation for the relationship between witnessing and battering is that witnessing is one of many sources of information; men also receive information from the larger society that it is appropriate to control your wife and to enforce this control through violence. Further, as emphasized in batterers' intervention programs, boys who witnessed domestic violence and grew up to be batterers learned more than just violence; rather, they learned—and thus can unlearn—lessons about the respective roles of men and women that contribute to their abusive behavior as adults.

Closely related to the "learned behavior" theory were the theories that described violence as the result of a loss of control. For example, many believed that men are abusive when they drink because the alcohol causes them to lose control. Others explained men's violence as a result of an inability to control their anger and frustration. These theorists argued that gendered societal expectations prevented men from expressing anger and frustration; these feelings would build up until the man lost control and released his feelings through the use of violence.

This "loss of control" theory is contradicted by batterers' behavior. Batterers' violence is carefully targeted to certain people at certain times and places. For example, batterers "choose not to hit their bosses or police officers, no matter how angry or 'out of control' they are." [From Ethel Klein et al., *Ending Domestic Violence: Changing Public Perceptions/Halting the Epidemic* 6 (1997)]

Abusers also follow their own "internal rules and regulations about abusive behaviors." They often choose to abuse their partners only in private, or may take steps to ensure that they do not

leave visible evidence of the abuse. Batterers also chose their tactics carefully—some destroy property, some rely on threats of abuse, and some threaten children. Through these decisions, "perpetrators are making choices about what they will or will not do to the victim, even when they are claiming they 'lost it' or were 'out of control.'" Such decision-making indicates that they are actually in control of their abusive behaviors." [From Anne L. Ganley & Susan Schechter, *Domestic Violence: A National Curriculum for Family Preservation Practitioners* 19 (1995)] In fact, a recent study reported by the Family Violence Prevention Fund indicates that many batterers become more controlled and calm as their aggressiveness increases.

Another theory that was advanced was the "learned helplessness" theory. Lenore Walker, a psychologist in the United States, studied the behavior of women who stay in violent relationships. Walker hypothesized that women stay in abusive relationships because constant abuse strips them of the will to leave.

The learned helplessness theory, however, did not account for the fact that there are many social, economic and cultural reasons a woman might choose to stay in an abusive relationship. Women often have very rational reasons for staying—they may fear retaliation against themselves or their children, or they may not be able to financially support themselves or their children. They may be ostracized by their family and community if they leave.

Further, the learned helplessness theory is inconsistent with the fact that women surviving in abusive relationships attempt to leave many times and routinely act in very conscious ways to try to minimize the abuse directed at them and to protect their children. As Dobash and Dobash explain, "[w]omen are usually persistent and often tenacious in their attempts to seek help, but pursue such help through channels that prove to be most useful and reject those that have been found to be unhelpful or condemning." Battered women do not live their lives in a state of "learned helplessness." On the contrary, they often engage in a process of "staying, leaving and returning." During this process,

women make active and conscious decisions based on their changing circumstances: they leave for short periods in order to escape the violence and to emphasize their disaffection in the hope that this will stop the violence. In the beginning, they are generally not attempting to end the relationship, but are negotiating to reestablish the relationship on a non-violent basis.

In addition, the learned helplessness theory was based on perceived characteristics ostensibly shared by battered women, such as low self esteem, a tendency to withdraw, or perceptions of loss of control. Those who espoused the theory, however, rarely took into account the fact that these "characteristics" might be, in fact, the physical and psychological effects of the abuse.

Finally, the static model of "learned helplessness" is contradicted by the fact that the violence, and the woman's reaction to the violence, often changes over time. The first episode of violence is generally minor; victims may be surprised and shocked, and may not anticipate that it will occur again. Rather, as Dobash and Dobash explain, "they believe, as anyone might, in the potential for reform and are still committed to the relationship." Victims may begin to then

look to their own actions for an explanation. This is not surprising in societies which allocate to

wives the responsibility for happy husbands and families; women are expected to ask how their behavior 'caused' their husband's violence. Women eventually realize that solutions to the man's violence do not reside in a change of their own behavior. For some this realization comes fairly quickly while others take longer to overcome such culturally constructed notions.

The "cycle of violence" was the next theory to gain popularity in the United States. This theory was based on the belief that men did not express their frustration and anger because they had been taught not to show their feelings. The man's tension built until he exploded and became violent. The tension was released, and the couple enjoyed a "honeymoon" period, during which the husband was apologetic and remorseful.

This theory, however, was not consistent with women's experiences. Many women never experienced a honeymoon period. Others stated that there was no gradual build-up of tension, but rather unpredictable, almost random, episodes of battering. This theory also did not explain why men directed their explosions of rage only against their intimate partners. Dobash and Dobash explain that

the conception of a cycle of violence is static rather than dynamic and changing, does not deal with intentionality, and the notion of the third phase as a 'honeymoon' phase belies the experience of women who indicate that even the process of 'making-up' or reconstructing the relationship is carried out against the background of a personal history of violence and coercion and in the context of few viable alternatives to the violent relationship. [From R. Emerson Dobash & Russel P. Dobash, *Women, Violence and Social Change* 222-23, 225, 229-32 (1992)]

This theory was often paired with the "family/relationship conflict" model. According to this model, "both the man and the woman contribute to violence in an intimate relationship." This model assumes either that the relationship is characterized by mutual violence, or that "in many cases a wife provokes her husband by 'below-the-belt' arguments prompting a violence response from her husband." The woman's behavior contributes to the build-up of tension in the man, until the man explodes in a violent rage, followed by a honeymoon period.

Theories based on "mutual" violence do not take into account the different ways that men and women [use violence](#) in intimate relationships. Further, any theory that describes violence as a response to "provocation" from the other partner is simply another form of victim blaming. Nor does this model account for instances in which a husband explodes over trivial issues or starts beating his wife while she is asleep. [From Michael Paymar, *Building a Coordinated Community Response to Domestic Violence: An Overview of the Problem* 3-4 (1994)]

What was missing from all of these theories was a recognition of batterers' intent to gain control over their partners' actions, thoughts and feelings. The current understanding of abuse, represented by the "Power and Control Wheel," evolved out of many discussions with battered women and batterers through the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) in Duluth. The [Power and Control Wheel](#) describes the different tactics an abuser uses to maintain power and control over his partner.

In an abusive relationships, the batterer uses the pattern of tactics described in the Power and

Control Wheel to reinforce his use of physical violence. Violent incidents are not isolated instances of a loss of control, or even cyclical expressions of anger and frustration. Rather, each instance is part of a larger pattern of behavior designed to exert and maintain power and control over the victim.

The Power and Control Wheel is based on the assumption that the purpose of the violence is to exert power and control over another. The elements that formed the basis of earlier theories—a boy witnessing abuse as a child, or substance abuse—may be contributing factors, but are not the "cause" of the violence. Rather, the batterer consciously uses these tactics to ensure the submissiveness of his partner. As Schechter and Ganley explain, perpetrators of domestic violence

bring into their intimate relationships certain expectations of who is in charge and what the acceptable mechanisms are for enforcing that dominance. Those attitudes and beliefs, rather than the victim's behavior, determine whether or not perpetrators are domestically violent. [*From Schechter & Ganley, Domestic Violence: A National Curriculum for Family Preservation Practitioners* 19 (1995)]

The exercise of male violence, through which women's subordinate role and unequal power are enforced and maintained, is, in turn, tolerated and reinforced by political and cultural institutions and economic arrangements.

Over time, however, DAIP began to realize that even this theory—that batterers use violence to gain control and power—did not sufficiently capture the phenomenon of violence. While the Power and Control Wheel (i.e., coercive behaviors that establish power and control) did describe women's experiences, batterers in batterers' intervention programs did not articulate a desire for power and control when they talked about their use of these behaviors. Consequently, DAIP began to conceptualize violence within the larger context of society. Under this theory, violence is

a logical outcome of relationships of dominance and inequality—relationships shaped not simply by the personal choices or desires of some men to [dominate] their wives but by how we, as a society, construct social and economic relationships between men and women and within marriage (or intimate domestic relationships) and families. Our task is to understand how our response to violence creates a climate of intolerance or acceptance to the force used in intimate relationships. [*From Ellen L. Pence, "Some Thoughts on Philosophy," Coordinating Community Responses to Domestic Violence: Lessons from the Duluth Model* 25, 29-30 (Melanie F. Shepard & Ellen L. Pence eds., 1999).]

Adapted from Loretta Frederick's Presentation on Theories of Violence at the Domestic Violence Workshop, sponsored by the Bulgarian Centre for Human Rights, the [Gender](#) Project for Bulgaria Foundation, and The Advocates for Human Rights, in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, on June 2, 1997.

The American Bar Association's [Myths and Facts About Domestic Violence](#) provides additional discussion of the myths about domestic violence that have been generated by these theories.

A 1998 literature review, Alison Cunningham et al., [Theory-Driven Explanations of Male Violence Against Female Partners: Literature Update and Related Implications for Treatment and Evaluation](#) (1998), provides an in-depth analysis of many of these theories, their origin and foundations, advantages and limitations of each, and the implications of these theories for treatment and prevention strategies.

UNICEF's, [Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls](#), 6 Innocenti Digest 1, 7 (2000), provides an extended discussion of some of the cultural, legal, economic and political factors that help perpetuate violence against women. In particular, UNICEF links macro-economic dislocation and women's increasing economic activity with family violence.

The Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse presents an interesting [history](#) of the international battered women's movement from 753 B.C. to today. The Florida Coalition Against Domestic Violence offers a detailed [history](#) of the battered women's movement in the United States. ([www](#))

The "learned helplessness" theory was accompanied by a resurgence of the psychopathology; theorists argued that women stayed in abusive relationships because they suffered from a personality disorder that caused them to seek out abusive relationships as a means of self-punishment, or were addicted to abusive relationships. Many also maintained that women were co-alcoholics with their spouses and thus could be "treated" through alcohol addiction programs. These theories were inconsistent with the fact that women had very rational reasons for staying in relationships. In addition, while battered women may be subject to an increased risk of substance abuse, this is a consequence, not a cause, of the abuse.

Lesson 2

Husbands Gamble Away their Wife, Draupadi

Opening ritual: Repeat the opening ritual of visualizing the circle of women that await you. Silently acknowledge, "I am not alone. My co-learners (name each of them slowly, visualizing them as you do so) are out there wondering and waiting to see what I will do and say during this session. I anticipate interacting with them as I go forward." Embellish this ritual and make it your own. If after a few sessions, the ritual seems empty, feel free to drop it. If the impact grows on you, continue it and allow the mysterious presence of your co-learners to suffuse your studies.

[Buddhist singing bowl \(click to listen\)](#) The learning circle is now open.

Introduction

Last week, we considered two modern stories of domestic violence. This week we are going to go back in time and recover a very important story that comes from the 5000-year-old oral tradition known as the [Mahābhārata](#). This narrative epic (when it is written down) is equal in length to all the books in the Hebrew Scriptures taken together. Mallika Sarabhai (the actress shown to the left who plays the leading role of Draupadi in the video you about to see) describes the [Mahābhārata](#) in these

terms:

In India, we are brought up with the Mahabharata. It is the source of our popular heroes and heroines, our popular music, our bedtime stories, our parables on morality, our values. . . . For example, if there is one child in a school who is very strong or very large, the other children will compare him with Bhima [one of the husbands of Draupadi]. In India, when you talk about Draupadi or Krishna or Bhima in the middle of a contemporary conversation, you still know exactly what you are talking about [even today]. And that is the extent of the Mahabharata's contemporaneity in India today (*Peter Brooks and the Mahabharata*, ed. David Williams [Taylor and Francis, 1991] 99 & 101).

[Exploratory Question 2.0](#) <--Click to post here.

2.0 If you grew up in India, then to what degree are the words of Mallika Sarabhai true for you personally:

In India, we are brought up with the Mahabharata. It is the source of our

popular heroes and heroines, our popular music, our bedtime stories, our parables on morality, our values. . . .

Give a few examples from your life to illustrate this.

So, our mission here is to study this story and to learn its lessons about women and men who wrestled with violence long ago. This is a long but very dramatic Lesson. I have deliberately shortened this Lesson by making the Exploratory Question 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, and 2.8 completely optional. This is so such that you can easily go to the end (2.12) without becoming exhausted.

Story synopsis: In the [Hindu](#) epic [Mahābhārata](#), the **Pandava** (or Pandawa) brothers ([Sanskrit](#): पाण्डव pāṇḍavaḥ) are the five acknowledged sons of [Pandu](#) ([Sanskrit](#): पांडु), by his two wives [Kunti](#) and [Madri](#). Their names are [Yudhishtira](#), [Bhima](#), [Arjuna](#), [Nakula](#) and [Sahadeva](#). In the following excerpt, we learn how the five brothers are living as Brahmin monks and begging for alms. Arjuna takes part in a contest and wins the hands of the beautiful princess, Draupadi. And what do we need to know about Draupadi? Just these three aspects:

Draupadi: "Draupadi is considered to be one of the five most beautiful women of Indian mythology--her skin was burnished gold and smooth as the softest silk. The luster of her perfect, fire-glowing skin was known far and wide, and in her time she was the most sought after woman in India" (*India Abroad* 08 Nov 2002).

"Draupadi is regarded by most Hindus as the exemplification of [bhakti](#) [devotion] to God. She shows utmost faith in Lord Krishna, and he accordingly protects his servant." ([www](#))

Draupadi is also the fiercely loyal and humbly obedient wife to five husbands. In cases of emergency, however, she goes beyond the bounds of acceptable conduct in order to redeem her five husbands even when they have miserably disappointed her. As such, she represents the ideal woman (much as does the Virgin Mary among Roman Catholics).

Here is where our story begins. . . .

The
Pandavas
[a mother
and her
five
grown
sons]
reached
the city
of
Kampilya.
They
stayed in
the house
of a
potter
and were
daily
going
around
begging
for alms.
They

heard in the city about the preparation for the [Swayamvar](#) of Draupadi. A huge hall was erected for the purpose and all kings of far and near kingdom, had been invited.

To win the princess, one had to compete in an archery competition. On the top of a pole one fish was constantly revolving. The pole was fixed in the centre of the hall. There was kept a vessel full of water. Watching the reflection of the fish, with five arrows, the eye of the fish had to be pierced.

One by one all the mighty kings renowned for their valor tried and failed. Some were not able to string the bow even, whereas some missed the mark very nearly. When all the kings failed to shoot the eye of the fish, Arjuna, with the permission of Yudhishthira [his eldest brother], came to the stage and took the bow in his hands [as shown in the pic above]. In no time he took aim and shot his first arrow, which pierced the eye of the fish, and the fish came down on the floor. A big chaos erupted. All the kings united together tried to prevent Arjuna from taking Draupadi [because he was a humble and poor ascetic and (as they imagined) not a prince]. Their objections were all defeated, however, when Draupadi came forward and garlanded Arjuna, thereby choosing him as her husband (as shown in the pic below).

Exploratory Question 2.1 <-- Click here to post

2.1a Why does Draupadi's father set up a feat of archery by way of choosing a suitable husband for his daughter? What is the wisdom in this? Why doesn't he just allow Draupadi make a choice for herself?

2.1b Draupadi is largely passive in this narrative. Then, suddenly, she steps forward and makes her choice. What reasons might she have for this sudden action? Why does she fight to have this poor archer-ascetic for her husband when all the rich princes objected to him?

[Reminder: Continue to offer feedback, esp. readback lines, as soon as you post.]

When they arrived home, Yudhisthira [the eldest brother] told Kunti [his mother] that they had brought "Bhiksha" (alms). Kunti, in response, said, "Remember, my sons, to [divide everything equally amongst yourselves](#)." When Kunti realised that Yudhisthira had meant Draupadi by "Bhiksha," great consternation ensued. The Pandavas were dumb struck. They agreed that Arjuna won Draupadi, but [the words of their mother were more sacred to them than all the Scriptures](#). They decided that Draupadi would become the common wife to all five of them. Such an arrangement was not entirely prohibited by the [Hindu] Scriptures. ([www](#) slightly modified)

Exploratory Question 2.2

2.2a What motivates Kunti to have raised her sons to divide everything (no matter how small or how large) equally amongst themselves?

2.2b How does this training immediately set the brothers to rethinking how they ought to fulfill their mother's words? What does it say about these sons that "[the words of their mother were more sacred than all the scriptures to them](#)"? Would you say that you reverence the words of your mother "as more sacred than all the scriptures"? How so, if you respond "yes." Why not, if "no."

2.2c Do you find yourself, as the hearer of this narrative, inclined to regard the

sons departure from sacred tradition as **a great strength** or as **a fatal weakness**? Explain yourself as fully as you can.

When Sage [Vyasa](#) visits the family, he explains to Draupadi that her unique position as the wife of five brothers results from a certain incident in her previous birth. She had in that lifetime prayed to Lord [Shiva](#) to grant her a husband with five desired qualities [just, ferocious in the face of enemies, kind, wise, and heroic]. Lord Shiva, **pleased with her devotion**, tells her that it is very difficult to get a husband with all five qualities that she desired. But she sticks to her ground and repeatedly asks for the same. Then Lord Shiva grants her wish saying that she will get her wish in her next birth. Hence, as a response to Lord Shiva's promise, Draupadi gets married to five brothers each who represents a given quality that she prayed for in her future husband. ([www](#))

Exploratory Question 2.3

2.3a Notice Draupadi's persistence in her prayer even when Lord Shiva explains to her that it is nearly impossible to fulfill her wish. What does this say about her? What does it say about Lord Shiva?

2.3b Have you ever known this persistence in your prayer even when its fulfillment seemed impossible? Please explain.

2.3c Notice that reincarnation is taken for granted in the oldest Hindu sources. What role does reincarnation play at this moment in the Mahabharata? Do you yourself believe in reincarnation? Why or why not.

Our story now jumps ahead in time. The Padava brothers shared Draupadi as their common wife. They wondrously prospered because of their choice. In the words of the narrative:

Draupadi took great delight in her five heroic husbands, and they too took delight in her. And in consequence of the illustrious Pandavas being exceedingly virtuous in their practice, the whole race of Kurus [their extended family] was **free from sin, and happy, grew in prosperity**. (1.215)

Optional Exploratory Question 2.4

2.4a Learning of this, do you now want to change your opinion (offered in 2.2c above) regarding their departure from sacred tradition? How so?

2.4b What do you imagine that the Mahabharata means by "free from sin**"? How could the narrator regard the Padava brothers as "free from sin" when clearly they arranged their marriage outside of sanctioned tradition? Discuss. [And, after posting, respond to the views expressed made by your learning partners.]**

Then, unknown to the brothers, another contest was arranged in which Yudhishthira [the eldest brother] was fraudulently led to gamble away

everything. The plot was arranged by [Shakuni](#) who was shamed by Draupadi many years earlier when she spontaneously laughed at a moment when he accidentally fell into a pool of water. Harboring this resentment, [Shakuni was bent upon seeking revenge](#). Here is the plot how his revenge took shape:

Gambling being a much popular pastime of the ruling classes of that time. [Shakuni](#) was not sure if Yudhisthira [the eldest brother] would accept such an invitation. They discussed the issue in all its aspect and details. Shakuni suggested, if any of the elders sent the invitation, then Yudhisthira could not refuse. Shakuni was sure that if Yudhisthira were caught in the trap of gambling it would be quite easy to raise the stakes to very high levels.

Duryodhana [Shakuni's collaborator] approached his [blind] father with his wicked scheme. [Dhritarastra, his father, was initially against such a plan](#). He was very reluctant to send such an invitation to the Pandavas. But Shakuni and Duryodhana, finally prevailed over his judgment and he agreed to invite the Pandavas for a game of dice. Dhritarastra had become [blind](#) to all his senses and his mind was also befogged by the [blind](#) love for his [eldest] son Duryodhana.

Shakuni was entrusted with the task of carrying this message to the Pandavas. Shakuni accepted this task very happily. He went to Indraprastha to invite the Pandavas for this purpose.

[Exploratory Question 2.5](#)

2.5a Earlier the reader was shown a wise mother raising her sons. Now a foolish father is introduced. The Mahabharata uses "blindness" here to evoke both the physical condition and the spiritual character of [Dhritarastra](#). How does this "blindness" show up in the conduct of Dhritarastra?

2.5b Does this character flaw in the father harm his son? How so?

2.5c If Dhritarastra was a wise father and king, what would he have done differently?

Vidura later apprised Yudhisthira of the deceitful schemes hatched up by Shakuni and Duryodhana to invite the Pandavas for gambling in order to win everything by trickery. Knowing all the underlying traps and deceitfulness, Yudhisthira still decided to obey the command of Dhritarastra [to join in the gambling]. Thus, the Pandavas and Draupadi started for Hastinapura.

In Hastinapura there was a grand reception for them. Extraordinary care was taken by the Kauravas to ensure that the stay of Pandavas was utmost pleasant. Gandhari [the king's wife] welcomed Kunti and Draupadi and [they stayed in her palace](#). [Notice that this society supported separate domains: men associate/recreate together and the women do the same.]

Next day the Pandavas visited the newly constructed palace "Jayanta". There in the great hall, the game of dice was arranged. All the Kaurava brothers along with Duryodhana, Bhishma, Drona, Kripa, Vidura all were there. [Karna](#) was also there. It was decided that [Shakuni](#) [the chief antagonist with a big grudge] would play dice on behalf of the Kauravas while Yudhisthira was to play dice on behalf of Pandavas.

Shakuni was a professional gambler and he knew the weakness of his challenger. He retorted, "Yudhishtira, let the dice decide our luck. Play fearlessly if you have the courage and accept whatever comes out of it. If you are afraid, you can refuse and quit now. There is no quitting after this."

Yudhishtira's pride was hurt. He did not want to withdraw in front of the dignitaries who came there to witness the game. He proudly said, "You may name the stake and I will agree."

Yudhishtira started losing from the very start. He lost his wealth, jewels, precious things, and all possessions. He then lost his part of the Padava kingdom. Finally, after having lost everything in gambling, only his brothers were left. They were there sitting with sullen faces with their heads down in shame and sadness. Then Shakuni said that if they (the four brothers) would put themselves up as the stake in their brother's gambling, whatever Yudhishtira had lost would be restored if he won or they would become the slaves of Kauravas if he lost. Yudhishtira lost this gamble also.

Then Shakuni asked that Draupadi, their shared wife, be made the stake in the gambling. They would get back everything if Yudhishtira won. Otherwise Draupadi too would become a slave of the Kauravas. Yudhishtira lost this game also. Thus, everything and everyone was lost. ([www](#) slightly modified)

At this point, Draupadi was ordered to appear before her new master. She asks the messenger, "Did Yudhishtira bid me in the game of dice before or after he lost his own freedom?" No answer is given. Draupadi refuses to come (since she is having her monthly menstrual flow). Shakuni order his servant to drag her to him by her hair.

Draupadi quickly realizes that her marriage and her future are forever gone. She is doomed to be forever humiliated as a sex toy of her new masters and anyone they should be pleased to give her. Her husbands (bound by the code of male honor) hold their heads down in shame. Later they will be further shamed when members of Shakuni's household openly use and abuse their former wife.

Exploratory Question 2.6

2.6a What is the code of male honor operative here that prevents the men from taking action to defend and protect Draupadi? Explain. [Connect this to what you saw in Lesson One if you like.]

2.6b Why do men in contemporary society likewise gamble away their family's resources and destroy the lives of their wives and children? How do you explain this?

2.6c What options are open to Draupadi?

Now Draupadi breaks sharply with social convention. She ought to obey her new master immediately and unquestioningly. She no longer has a will of her own for she is "his slave" with the right to use and abuse her "as he pleases." None the less, Draupadi risks making an emotional

appeal for justice to the elders present in this male assembly. Draupadi repeatedly questions the legality of the right of Yudhishtira to place her at stake when he himself had lost his freedom first and as a consequence did not possess her as his disposable property in the first place. Draupadi boldly continues her argument as follows:

"Happiness and misery pay their court to both the wise and unwise. Morality, however, it has been said, is the one highest object in the world. If cherished, it will certainly dispense blessings to us. Let not that morality now abandon the Kauravas. . . .

"The king was summoned to this assembly and though possessing no skill at dice, he was made to play with skillful, wicked, deceitful and desperate gamblers. How can [he be](#) said then to have staked [anything] voluntarily? The chief of the Pandavas was deprived of his senses by wretches of deceitful conduct and unholy instincts, acting together, and then [he was] vanquished. [He could not understand their tricks](#), but he hath now done so. Here, in this assembly. . . , reflecting well upon my words, duly decide the point that I have put [before you]." (2.64)

Everybody remains dumbfounded and silent. [Bhishma](#), the patriarch of the Kaurava family and a formidable warrior, has only this weak explanation to offer to Draupadi - "[The course of morality is subtle, and even the illustrious wise men in this world fail to understand it.](#)"

Duryodhana now commands the Pandavas to strip themselves in the manner of slaves. They obey by stripping off their upper garments [as a mark of their slavery]. Then the Kauravas demand the same from Draupadi. She refuses. Then to the horror of everybody present, Dushasana tries to strip Draupadi of her [sari](#) [and to render her completely [naked as a slave](#) open to the examination of her new masters].

[Exploratory Question 2.7](#)

2.7a Draupadi's quick wit sees that there is only one option to her complete submission--namely, raising the issue of justice/morality before the elders present. To make this last ditch rescue attempt succeed, she cannot challenge the code of male honor since her spontaneous appeal presumes that the elders can and will be able to decide (for all concerned) whether justice/morality has been done. What, then, is the wisdom of her rescue attempt?

2.7b Does Bhishma's comment (in blue) help or hinder her rescue attempt? Does her former husbands' willingness to strip themselves help or hinder her rescue attempt? Explain. If her "husbands" were truly wise, what would they have been doing by way of forwarding her rescue attempt?

2.7c The elders remain dumbfounded and silent. Why so? What hinders them from seriously hearing Draupadi case and debating among themselves its validity?

Seeing her husbands unable or unwilling to help her, Draupadi prays to Lord [Krishna](#) to protect her. A miracle occurs henceforward, which is popularly attributed to Krishna but in Vyasa's Mahabharata, Draupadi's saviour is named as "Dharma" (who could be just morality, the god

Dharma, Krishna as the Lord of Dharma). As [Dushasana](#) unwraps layers and layers of her sari, her sari keeps getting extended. Bhima is furious at Dushasana and says, "I Bhima, Pandu's son, vow that until I will tear open Dushasana's chest and drink his blood I will not show my face to my ancestors." Finally, a tired Dushasana backs off without being able to strip Draupadi.

[This powerful scene can be seen in this Hindi film. While most will be unable to understand the words, the emotional tension comes through. Click twice on the icon below to view the film. If this fails, load into your browser or click here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o4uXEw8N17k> For a longer version, click here:

<http://www.youtube.com/v/o4uXEw8N17k&hl=en&fs=1>]

Optional Exploratory Question 2.8

2.8a What first impressions do you gain from this video clip?

2.8b Abandoned by everyone, Draupadi makes her final appeal to Lord Krishna. He quickly comes to her aid by miraculously preventing her new masters from disrobing her. But is this enough? Why doesn't Krishna cause her would-be molesters to be blinded or to be struck with some horrible disease? Why does her miracle not persuade her molesters that, with God on her side, they had better back off (lest they incur Lord Krishna's wrath)?

2.8c Why does Draupadi even attempt to make her abortive appeal for justice in the first place? Why doesn't she just pray to Lord Krishna from the very beginning?

Finally, the [blind](#) monarch Dhritarashtra's conscience is stirred, in part fearing the wrath of Pandavas against his sons. He intervenes and asks Draupadi to wish for whatever she desires [by way of making amends for her shameful treatment at the hands of his clan]. Draupadi asks that her husbands, the Pandavas, to be freed from bondage. Dhritarashtra grants her wish and also restores to Pandavas all they lost in the game of dice. . . . After many words of reconciliation between Pandavas and Dhritarashtra, Pandavas withdraw to their kingdom along with Draupadi and their entourage.

Exploratory Question 2.9

2.9a Finally, a single elder speaks out. Why, of all persons, is it Dhritarashtra? Why does the drama have to continue to this point before he finds the courage to speak?

2.9b Why doesn't Dhritarashtra decide, in Draupadi's favor, that the gambling

was unjust from the very beginning? Why doesn't Dhritarashtra expose the whole plot as a concoction by Shakuni to get revenge for the slight he suffered at the hands of Draupadi? Why does his giving of Draupadi a wish cleverly provide an end-run to these options?

2.9c Given the utter failure of her husbands during the last three hours, how can you explain that Draupadi's only wish is for their freedom? What does this say about the character of Draupadi?

Shakuni, Karna and Duryodhana later convince Dhritarashtra to invite Pandavas for a new game of dice, with modified rules. It was following the defeat in this new game that Pandavas were sent into exile for 12 years. ([www](#)) Following this, there results a terrible war in which thousands are killed and thousands are reduced to slavery. The slight suffered by a single man inflicted by a single woman thus results in horrific consequences for thousands of innocent women, men, and children.

Probative Explorations 2.10

2.10a Overall, what are the most significant discoveries you made here regarding violence against women? [This is the key question here. Give it some time. After posting, carefully read and comment on all the responses of your learning partners.] How has the Mahabharata presented the victimized women differently than Judges?

2.10b This narrative almost cries out for hearing the voices of the women. Feel free to write a poetry or prose lament for Draupadi. [Notice that the Padava brothers lament the evil they have brought upon Draupadi but, bound as they are by the male code of honor, they are seemingly incapable of stepping outside this code to protect Draupadi.]

2.10c Are there any unsettling questions that remain unanswered for you? Write them here in the hope that one of your co-learners will have some insights. [Respond to the unanswered questions of your learning partners.]

Draupadi Phenomena in Contemporary India

The story of Draupadi stands for modern Indian woman as the heroine that combines fierce independence and fierce loyalty to family. As such, Draupadi is at the center of the women's movement in India. Three illustrations are provided:

Illustration #1--Dance

Kolkata, 17 Jan 2007 -- In a unique presentation of relating mythological characters with the modern times, the noted Odissi danseuse Sanchita Bhattacharya has come up with a composition titled **The Draupadi Phenomenon** based on "Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2006".

The dance drama relates how the landmark Government Bill to protect women from domestic violence not only warns everyone from physical violence against women but also highlights the rights of women. The Parliament of India passed the Bill recently. Sanchita, the director, feels the problems of women should be discussed at all levels:

The **Draupadi** Phenomenon is something which belongs to my heart. This phenomenon is 3,000-year-old Oddissi dance and 5,000-year-old **Draupadi** character from Mahabharata culminated to tell the story to remind that [it's high time the women got their rights to live by her own choice](#). Let her live her own life in her own terms, stop deciding for her.

Illustration #2--Video

[Click here to see a contemporary video](#) that presents the life of Draupadi as a model for womanhood. She is a prophet, mother, and queen--all in one.

Illustration #3--A Journal Article

Here is a modern variant on Draupadi's classical story: ["There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed"](#): Resistance to Indian cultural conventions regarding female nudity. By L. Wilson. Asian Journal of Women's Studies. 2000 Sep 30; 6(3):[5]. Only a synopsis is provided here, but this will suffice.

Probative Explorations 2.11

2.11a Reflect on one or more of the above as an indication of the "Draupadi phenomena" in modern Indian culture.

2.11b How does the act of remembering the past energize women to recreate society such that such events could never happen again?

When finished, take a break. Make some tea for yourself or take a five-minute walk or dance to your favorite music.

Feedback 2.12 Then, coming back refreshed, quickly review your entire experience.

2.12a How many minutes did you use to complete Lesson Two? Was this more/less time than you had expected? Did you find yourself in a good place (both physically and mentally) to be able to work uninterrupted? Offer a few words of explanation. What changes can you make on your side to increase the satisfaction that you find in this learning circle?

2.12b Were there any processes, instructions, or probative questions in our text that were difficult to understand or annoying for you? Explain. Name any technical difficulties encountered. How did you solve them? What help/improvement do you still require?

2.12c Overall (on a scale of +1 to +10), what is your satisfaction with Lesson Two.

Is there anything that the Instructional Team should include or remove from this lesson?



Congratulations!

With this, you have finished your first session. If only a few have posted their writings as of yet, return in a few days and post your responses to their writing.

[Buddhist singing bowl \(click on arrow to listen\)](#)

The learning circle is now officially closed.

Further Readings

JAIPUR (India): A [man allegedly staked his wife in gambling after he lost his money and possessions](#) to his friends in Baran district of Rajasthan. The 25-year-old woman told the police on Friday that she was repeatedly raped by her husband's friends who kept her hostage for a week.

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, "The Story of Draupadi's Disrobing: Meaning for our Times," Signposts (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001) 332-358.

Trina Nileena Banerjee, "[Written on the body](#)" (Draupadi's Disrobing in modern theater) Feb 2006

[Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *The Palace of Illusions*](#) (Doubleday, 2008) ([read first chapter](#))(a fictional novel from Draupadi's point of view).

[The Erotic Indian Rapunzel Myth](#) (blog 03 Nov 07)

[Draupadi's nights heat up Andhra](#), The Telegraph (Calcutta) January 13 , 2010

[Breast Stories](#), by Mahasweta Devi; Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Seagull Books: Calcutta, 1997) ISBN: 8170461405

[Of Women, Outcastes, Peasant and Rebels: A Selection of Bengali Short Stories](#), Edited, translated, and with an Introduction by Kalpana Bardhan; University of California Press; 1990; ISBN: 0520067142

Chatline

[Hinduism ~ What are your views about Draupadi...?](#)

Rape of Draupadi by the Serpent King

[Draupadi](#) is having her siesta one beautiful afternoon in Hastinapura. Her maids gently comb her hair as she sleeps. As they do so, a single hair from her golden tresses breaks off and comes loose. The maids are terrified and look at one another, their eyes full of terror. They fear for what would happen when Draupadi awakens and sees what has happened. Eventually they decide to hang the hair from the window, perhaps hoping the wind will carry it away.

And the wind sees the strand of hair and decides to play a prank. Storm after storm rush towards Hastinapura. The single hair dangling from the royal window is lifted up, carried far and dropped. But such is the weight of that hair that the earth is not able to bear it and splits open, giving way, and the hair floats down right into Patala where the king of serpents and the lord of the netherworlds, Vasuki Naga [\[1\]](#), has been asleep for twelve years and his queens, the Padma Naginis [\[2\]](#), are fanning him. As the strand of hair falls on the chest of the mighty king of Patala, unable to bear its weight Vasuki's chest begins to quake and he wakes up in a shock. He picks up the hair and studies it – it is a woman's hair. He springs up and going to the seventh chamber in the basement, opens it.

The queens realize Vasuki is planning to visit the earth. They gather around him and ask him where he is going and he tells them he is going to the earth in search of the woman with golden hair. The Padma Naginis tell him not to get entangled with a woman who does not belong to him, that is a dangerous path, he will be committing a sin. They tell him each of them would keep him with her for twelve years in her bed and pleasure him. He tells them not to worry and promises he would just have a look at the woman with golden hair and would be back. Vasuki does the sixteen sringaras, and the queens move around him wailing aloud.

Vasuki mounts his horse, whips it, a dust-storm rises up as the horse takes off whinnying mightily towards the earth. They are now in a meadow on the earth. Vasuki pulls the reins of the horse and wonder where to go now. On a hunch, he decides to go westward. The horse flies like the wind. Soon large cities appear.

The king of Patala searches for the queen with golden hair in the markets of these cities. Eventually he reaches a lake on the outskirts of a city, decides to rest there for a while and dismounts. He is unable to rest, though – for in his mind is the queen with the golden hair. [It is a queen, and as such another man's wife, he is searching for, and not a princess.] As he stands there, on the bank of the lake, searching far with his eyes, he sees yet another city in the distance: Hastinapura. He mounts his horse again, whips it and the horse starts fleeing. The bird of good omen calls and the king's heart is filled with joy. In the royal gardens of Hastinapura, he ties the horse under a champa tree and gives it fresh grass. Then, whip in his hand, he starts merrily walking towards the cloud palace.

Draupadi is now sitting on a swing. The rays of the sun fall on her hair through the window. The light is reflected by Draupadi's golden hair, and it blinds Vasuki for a moment. Such is his joy there are goosebumps all over his body. His feet quicken.

Draupadi sees him and thinks a guest has lost his way and is coming towards the queen's apartments instead of going to the royal assembly. She sends her maids to show him the way. He ignores their directions, pushes them away roughly and proceeds towards Draupadi undaunted.

Seeing him approaching, Draupadi gets up to go to the inner chambers. But before she can do so, Vasuki swings the whip and lashes it at Draupadi's thin waste. Draupadi runs, falls down, her scarf moves off her head and Vasuki realizes this is the woman he has been looking for. He rushes towards her and falls over her. Draupadi shouts at him and asks him to get away if he wants to remain alive, for the Pandavas would kill him if they come to know of his being here. Ignoring her words, Vasuki picks her up and carries her to her bed.

Draupadi screams from the bed and Vasuki tells her he has been hungry for her for days. Her fury has no effect on him. Instead, he orders her to warm water for his bath. After the water is heated, she bathes him. He then asks her to prepare a thirty-two course meal for him. She does so and then serves the meal in gold plates and, while he remains reclining on the bed, feeds him, placing the food with her hands in his mouth. As she feeds him, she wonders who this obstinate man is. The meal over, she again tells him to hurry away. He tells her that when a man comes, he does not go away like that; as for him, he plans to spend the night there.

In the meantime, the Pandava assembly is over and the sounds of people dispersing could be heard. Vasuki tells Draupadi not to worry, let her husband come. So powerful are the steps of Arjuna as he approaches that the very rooftops of the palace quake. As Arjuna enters the chamber, Vasuki jumps up from the bed and gathers Arjuna in a mighty stranglehold in his arms. The fight that ensues is terrible – it takes the two of them down to Patala, back to the earth, then to the skies. Eventually Vasuki defeats Arjuna, and sitting on his chest, ties up his hands and legs with a hair pulled out from his moustache. He then hoists him up onto a peg on the wall.

Draupadi now gets her bed ready for them. Fragrant flowers are spread on it, musk and flower essences are sprinkled. Seated on the bed, the Pandava queen and the king of Patala play a game of dice. Arjuna hanging from the peg is a witness to the game. After the game of dice, the two of them move on to another game. Draupadi and Vasuki have sex, now tenderly, now furiously, right before his eyes. Their games are now hot, now tender and poor Arjuna watches it all helplessly.

In the morning Vasuki leaves promising to come back again in the evening. Before leaving, he picks up his shining sword and cuts off the whisker with which he had bound Arjuna's hands and feet. Arjuna falls to the ground with a thud.

Draupadi comes running to Arjuna, raises him up, consoles him and leading him to the bed, lays him down on it. She heats water and massages and bathes him. She cooks another thirty-two course meal and feeds him. Arjuna then whimpers to Draupadi that this will now be an everyday affair. "It is fine with you," he says, "but my bones break. Oh, how I have to suffer!" He asks her to find out how to kill Vasuki from Vasuki himself and Draupadi promises to do so.

Back in Patala, Vasuki finds no more pleasure in the company of his wives or the food they serve him. He passes the day impatiently waiting for the evening. In the evening, back at Hastinapura,

he finds Draupadi restlessly waiting for him. Arjuna is again tied up and hung from the peg and becomes the helpless witness to their games.

Before that however, Draupadi through a clever pretext learns from Vasuki that he is not in the least afraid of the Pandavas – the only one he fears is Karna, who belongs to the Kauravas. That night while Vasuki is asleep, she crawls into his stomach and learns the secret of his death.

The next morning after Vasuki has left, Draupadi again raises up Arjuna from the ground where he had fallen with a thud as Vasuki snapped the whisker that bound his hands and legs and lays him on the bed. She reveals the secret of killing Vasuki to Arjuna through Karna. Arjuna is reluctant to take help from Karna – that would be humiliating to him, but Draupadi convinces him that there is no other way. Agreeing, he goes and sits under a tree waiting for Karna on his way to the Kauravas. As Karna sees him and greets him, Arjuna acknowledges the greeting with his foot, raising it to receive it.

Karna flies into a fury at this insult. He asks Arjuna what his fault was to be insulted thus in the morning. And Arjuna tells him: “You, without a father! Who is your father? And you spoil my days by showing your face to me every morning. That is why I took your greeting on my ankle.”

In a rage, the tormented Karna flees to his mother, Mansa Malin [\[3\]](#) and questions her about who his father is. Initially she tells him she and the mali are his parents, but when he threatens her, she admits they are his foster parents, he is a foundling, they brought him up after they found him in a rubbish heap. She advises Karna to go to Kunti.

He goes straight to Kunti and asks her how many children she gave birth to. When Kunti says five, he threatens her too and then she admits no, she has given birth to six children and she had buried him, Karna, under a rubbish heap. Under pressure she later admits that he is the son of Soorya, the sun god. When he asks for a proof for this, she gives him an *agan-pichhaura* [\[4\]](#) and a ball of wax and asks him to go to Bengal and meet the rising sun there. Karna proceeds towards Bengal.

Having reached there, as the sun rises up in the east, Karna covers it up with the *agan-pichhaura*. Soorya tries to free himself from the *agan-pichhaura* and failing, asks him who he is and why he has stopped his rays. Karna tells him he is his son come to meet him. Soorya asks him to free him but Karna wants Soorya to promise him that he would meet him face to face. Soorya promises, on condition that Karna passes a test to prove that he is really his son. The freed sun attacks Karna with a thousand blazing rays. The rays pass through him without harming him. Karna has won the test, Soorya acknowledges him, and the father and the son meet affectionately.

Karna asks Soorya to give him his weapon so that he could teach the Pandavas a lesson and punish Arjuna for his insult. Soorya advises him patience and gives him an *agan-katari*, a fire dagger, asking him to keep it in the wax scabbard given to him by his mother and not to take it out except in dire necessity. The dagger, says the sun god, is dangerous and if it is taken out without a real need, the earth would split, the nine hundred thousand stars would burn down to

ashes, and so would the gods in heaven, the gods in the netherworlds, the forests with all their trees and bushes, and even the winds along with all the water on the earth.

As a happy Karna returns towards Hastinapura with sprightly steps, Draupadi sees him from afar. She hurries to him, stops him on the way, and tells him why Arjuna has insulted him – she tells him of Vasuki's atrocities and the terrible misery he has reduced her and Arjuna to. She tells him that Vasuki would be coming as soon as the sun reaches the west. "He will tie the horse to the champa tree and then come to my chamber. He will tie up your brother Arjuna's hands and legs with a hair of his moustache and hang him up from a tall peg on the wall, and then he will have his pleasure with me the whole night." They are dying because of Vasuki's atrocities, she tells him, and then adds that he alone can save them now. Karna's anger is now directed at Vasuki and he promises to do what she desires.

That evening Vasuki comes as usual again. After tying up his horse under the champa, he proceeds to Draupadi's palace, swinging his whip merrily. He ties up Arjuna as usual and hangs him up from the peg, from where he watches with unblinking eyes as the king of patala takes his pleasure by enjoying Draupadi all night. As he leaves the next morning, Draupadi tells him she is one life with him, there is no hero on the earth like him, she can't live a moment without him and if he must leave now, he should, but he must promise to hurry back in the evening without delay. Vasuki promises this and goes away, his heart filled with Draupadi's loving words.

Strolling through the Pandavas' garden the next morning, Karna comes across Vasuki's horse. He takes out Soorya's fire dagger from its wax scabbard and places it before the horse. Every limb of the horse is burnt. As Vasuki approaches, Karna places the agan-katar before him and Vasuki falls down on the ground. Karna burns up eight of the nine hoods of Vasuki. As his body catches fire, Vasuki joins his hands in supplication and begs for his life, promising Karna never to come that way again. Karma is moved by the begging and lets off the now single-hooded Vasuki.

Draupadi's Krishna

even before Krishna is on stage
I am worrying about Draupadi again
she's the lynch pin of the story

let me set it out
a woman has married an eligible young man
a famous archer
as she's arriving at his house after the betrothal
his mother Kunti in ignorance of the 'prize'
tells her five boys to share it
only when Draupadi enters does Kunti realise
that she has condemned her to five husbands
when gods decree such things
there is no escape
Draupadi bonds with all five

takes on their interests and passions
becomes the most important person in the household
after her mother-in-law

then the gambling begins
it's the eldest brother who gets them into this scrape
and he has a problem a gambling problem
he bets everything
his land his people his cattle his houses
his brothers himself and finally
Draupadi

she is in her room taking time out
because she's bleeding
she is fetched
dragged by her hair into the assembly
her sari is being torn
her body exposed
to a roomful of men
none of them moves
none of them protests
none of the five brothers
not a one

Draupadi in desperation calls on Krishna
gods have a bigger view
and he creates a deception
so that Draupadi's sari never unwinds
like the magic casket that never empties

my worry about Draupadi
is that she is never redeemed

think of this
a child is neglected abused abandoned
even if we can do nothing
we feel we should
we feel guilt sorrow
and inside we pledge something
we try to make it impossible for this to recur

a man called the son of god
is betrayed abandoned by his disciples
crucified
then worshipped

a woman

is betrayed in a game of chance
publicly humiliated
abandoned
and—
her mother-in-law has the greatest feeling for her
and Draupadi is then abandoned by the storyteller
only appearing in her role as wife to the five brothers
now forced into exile

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